

Countermeasures for Career Development of Drop-out Youths

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The goal of this study was to suggest various alternatives for drop-out youths based upon the analysis of current status. Specifically, the objectives of this study were (a) to identify the drop-out processes and the drop-out youths' needs through the typological approach, (b) to analyze the current status of support systems for drop-out youths, and (c) to suggest several educational and social policy measures for career development of drop-out youths. For these objectives, this study used the following methodologies: literature review, statistical analysis of the Korea Youth Panel Survey for the identification of drop-out youths' characteristics, in-depth interviews with drop-out youths, and discussions with some professionals and practitioners.

1. Current Status of Drop-out Youths

Drop-out youth was defined as youth who drop out of school, spontaneously or non-spontaneously, for personal, family, economic, or social reasons, excluding reasons of death or school transfer. Speaking strictly, there is no statistical data that outlines the exact size of drop-out youths. However, according to the Yearbook of Korea Educational Statistics, the size of 'Expelled, Drop-outs, and Absentee' students has increased over several years (cf. 87,738 (1997)→38,202 (2002)→53,044 (2007)).

Generally, drop-out behavior is known as having multi-dimensional characteristics. Decisions on dropping-out from school were affected by several factors, including intra-psychological elements. The analysis of the Korea Youth Panel Survey (KYPS) data indicated several characteristics about the relationship between drop-out behavior and related factors, although there were only 83 drop-out youths in the KYPS data. The results indicated that the more they could not find career alternatives, the more youths failed to feel the interest of their parents, the more they considered themselves negatively, and the more they were likely to treat interpersonal matters violently, the higher the probability of drop-out. The experience of career education in schools was negatively related to the drop-out status. This means that career education in school may largely prevent the problem of drop-out behavior.

2. Career Development Needs of Drop-out Youths

In-depth interviews suggested several significant results about drop-out behavior and the career development needs of drop-out youths. The major findings were as follows:

First, drop-out youths, especially non-adaptive drop-out youths, commonly expressed that they decided to drop-out from school because their school life was not fun, troublesome, and insignificant.

Second, their negative feelings about school life were related to several noticeable phenomena, including the decline of interest in school life, running away from home, and long-term absence from class. This means that drop-out behavior is deeply related to a vicious cycle that negative school behavior has formed.

Third, the level of academic achievement was low mainly because of an inappropriate school life. More important is that low academic achievement negatively affects their career development, with regard to educational advancement or transition to the labor market.

Fourth, drop-out youths had various experiences of working in labor markets. However, there was little evidence that their working experience positively affected their career development. In other words, their working experiences had only economic meaning, but no career meaning.

Fifth, drop-out youths made judgments that school was the most appropriate alternative for learning skills that they were interested in. However, they felt a lack of confidence in adapting to the school system, mainly because of an exclusive culture in schools. This feeling could be applied to other types of schools. For example, drop-out youths thought that they had to learn skills for a successful transition to the labor market. However, vocational education institutes, including vocational schools, could not become alternatives for drop-out youths, because they thought that the environment of every school would be exclusive.

Sixth, although they refused to return to school, they felt that some type of certification or diploma was needed for their lives. These thoughts led drop-out youths to an interest in school qualification examinations. However, they had faced problems in these examinations because of their low academic achievements.

Seventh, the most common characteristic about their future careers was

‘vagueness’. When asked ‘After dropping out of school, what plans do you have?’, drop-out youths had difficulty in giving concrete answers about their future. This ‘vagueness’ could be related to low achievement in school. In other words, they had little information about themselves because they had few successful experiences and lacked experience in career education programs. Eighth, drop-out youths were passive in terms of career exploration or career preparation. In addition, the career information they had was restricted, or in many cases incorrect.

3. Countermeasures for the Career Development of Drop-out Youths

Comprehensive support is needed for the career development of drop-out youths, including academic, vocational, career, basic life, economic, and inter-personal support. For these reasons, several types of institutes need to actively participate in support for drop-out youths. Especially, regular schools have important roles in the support systems. First of all, the improvement of academic achievement is an important issue for drop-out youths. Accordingly, this study suggests several measures for the career development of drop-out youths, as follows:

A. Prevention of drop-out behavior

- Activation of a WEE center and WEE class
- Management of various programs to meets youths' needs in schools
- Activation of outreach programs based on cooperation from community

B. Support for career development and a stable life

- Strengthening 1:1 mentoring services for drop-out youths
- Strengthening the career counseling function in drop-out support institutes (cf. youth counseling center)
- Strengthening career development competencies of drop-out youths through career exploration or career development programs
- Strengthening support systems for providing stable opportunities in part-time jobs
- Expanding social jobs for academic and vocational development

- Strengthening educational-vocational-career information networks for drop-out youths
- Strengthening return-to-school programs